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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001709

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR ENGAGES FOREIGN SECRETARY ON PEACE
PROCESS, ASEAN, NORTH KOREA

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a wide-ranging conversation over lunch with Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo, Ambassador discussed a broad array of key bilateral subjects, including ASEAN, North Korea, the Philippine peace process, and labor issues. Romulo welcomed the planned ASEAN Regional Forum disaster relief exercise and was sanguine that it would yield concrete results. On North Korea, Romulo praised the Bush administration's successful negotiations, offering that it was important to make as much progress as possible now that there was clear momentum. Regarding the Philippine government's peace process with Muslim insurgents, the Ambassador congratulated Romulo on the government's July 16 breakthrough on long-stalled negotiations. Romulo was appreciative of U.S. engagement to push the process forward and said he would seek to meet with Malaysian interlocutors regarding the peace process and ceasefire monitoring issues during the ASEAN Regional Forum meetings in Singapore. With regard to Doha, Romulo firmly stressed that President Arroyo's assurances to President Bush represented Philippine policy, and instructions to demonstrate support for U.S. positions had been relayed to the Philippine ambassador in Geneva. Romulo was similarly unequivocal in his support for an International Labor Organization technical mission to the Philippines to review workers' rights protections. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Secretary Romulo noted that he would be attending the upcoming ASEAN Regional Forum meetings in Singapore, and said that while Secretary Rice's schedule was likely quite full, he hoped that the Secretary would be able to talk at least briefly to discuss key issues such as the peace process, security cooperation, Burma and the Doha round. Romulo said positive words about the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) disaster-relief exercise planned for next year, noting that although it was still unclear which countries would be able to participate, he welcomed the idea of an exercise of achievable scope that could offer concrete results.

¶3. (C) Turning to the subject of North Korea, the Ambassador commented on recent positive moves in the Six Party Talks. The Foreign Secretary responded that "not everyone feels that way," explaining that both Japanese and Korean officials had expressed to him a certain skepticism regarding recent progress, apparently worrying that their particular issues were not sufficiently addressed. Romulo opined that it was important to make as much progress as possible to build on the recent positive momentum.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador offered her congratulations on the July 16 breakthrough in the Philippine government's long-stalled negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The Foreign Secretary agreed that this was an important step and praised the efforts of Presidential Peace Advisor Hermogenes Esperon. Romulo said that he hoped to be able to talk with his Malaysian counterpart in Singapore next week to discuss next steps in the peace process given Malaysia's role as facilitator of the talks. He hoped that

Philippine government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front could formally agree to a memorandum of agreement (MOA) on the territorial issues by July 24, and that he and Malaysia's foreign minister might sign the MOA soon thereafter. He also expected further discussions with Malaysia on the announced pullout by the end of August of Malaysians from the international monitoring team overseeing the ceasefire.

15. (C) With regard to Doha negotiations, Ambassador followed up on the assurances of close coordination and cooperation that President Arroyo gave to President Bush in the Oval Office last month. Romulo stressed without reservation that the assurances represented firm Philippine policy and said that instructions to demonstrate flexibility and support for U.S. positions had been relayed to Philippine Ambassador Teehankee in Geneva. In order to ensure that Teehankee is clear on these instructions, Romulo pledged to contact him personally before the start of the talks to make sure he understands. (Septel describes Embassy discussions with Philippine officials on the Doha Ministerial.)

16. (C) Turning to U.S. concern about Philippine labor issues and the potential for this to affect Philippine tariff benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), the Ambassador raised the importance of moving rapidly to allow an International Labor Organization technical mission to the Philippines to review workers' rights protections. Romulo was unequivocal in his support for such a technical mission. While discussing labor rights, Romulo took the opportunity to seek the Ambassador's views on where the Philippines stood, from the U.S. perspective, on progress in Trafficking in Persons (TIP). Ambassador responded that we

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applauded recent progress in combating trafficking, including a recent TIP conviction in Batangas, but underscored the importance of further prosecutions and convictions.
KENNEY